

## **By Gabriel Vasquez**

### **Policy and possibility for America's future**

A consortium of expertise was tapped for the first-ever Re-Energize America conference hosted Monday, Aug. 31, and Tuesday, Sept. 1, at New Mexico State University.

More than 500 gathered to listen to lawmakers, energy company executives and experts – among them U.S. Department of Energy Secretary Steven Chu – in hopes of learning more about New Mexico's energy future and to discuss solutions for America's energy crisis.

In large part, the conference was organized by District 2 U.S. Rep. Harry Teague, who received a warm welcome from conference attendees. NMSU's Institute for Energy and the Environment also led efforts to plan the event.

About two-dozen Teague supporters welcomed the congressman outside of Corbett Center Student Union Monday, holding various poster board signs and vocally expressing their support to passers by.

New Mexico State University Interim President Manuel Pacheco kicked off the session by encouraging further events in which policymakers, business owners and industry experts could

meet in university settings to find common ground.

“Our dependence on foreign oil, the increase of greenhouse gases and the changes in our climate have placed the United States at a critical juncture to become the leader in funding innovative and sustainable resources for energy,” Pacheco said. “We hope this conference will literally re-energize America to be the leader in the world’s quest for sustainable energy and an energy-efficient future.”

The conference, which was divided into six sessions, featured a variety of notable panelists.

Dick Williams, president of Shell Wind, spoke about the challenges of developing a homegrown energy economy from the nation’s existing resources.

“At Shell, we operate on three hard truths,” he said. “One, is our source of energy is going to die. Second, the easy-to-get stuff is gone. Third, anything we do has an environmental stress.”

Lt. Gov. Diane Denish, a keynote speaker, talked about the importance of New Mexico to the U.S. as a developer of energy-efficient technology and infrastructure for other states to model.

“I think our state is in the lead, but it’s our challenge to stay in the lead,” Denish said. “In the policy arena, we have provided tax incentives. We have provided conservation standards and give rewards for green building. We’ve also, through the cumulative capital of our labs and educational institutions, been at the forefront of research and development related to alternative energy.”

Jeff Trucksess, president of Houston-based Green Earth Fuels, talked about small business and investor and venture capital relations, saying that if funding for developing energy technologies is not made available today, technologies such as biofuel may not succeed in the future.

“If this first generation of technology dies, it’s going to create huge problems for follow-up technologies,” he said. “The only thing that has a better memory than an elephant is a banker who lost money to you.”

The most heavily attended session was Monday afternoon, when Chu delivered a rousing speech regarding the state of America’s energy future and global climate change.

“The price of oil will go up in the coming decades and we will live in a carbon-constrained world,” he said. “We need a new industrial revolution. A new revolution to ensure American competitiveness, decrease our dependence on foreign oil and mitigate climate change.”

But the strongest audience reaction came after a speech delivered by Bob Gallagher, former NMSU regent and president of the New Mexico Oil & Gas Association.

“With all due respect to my friend Teague, Congress has failed the American public when it comes to energy,” he said. “They have just flat failed us.”

Gallagher, who was part of a panel discussing the expanded role of traditional energy sources such as oil, natural gas and nuclear power, said the U.S. would never truly become energy independent.

“If you think this country can be energy independent, you have not listened,” he said. “We’ve given up our place at the table when it comes to these decisions. We spend \$700 billion a year buying foreign oil. It’s ironic that we’re spending the same in stimulus to power the economic engine of the U.S. The U.S. is drunk on cheap energy.”

Paul Foster, CEO of El-Paso based Western Refining, shared a similar sentiment.

“The undeniable reality is that oil, coal and natural gas will remain for as long as any of us can see into the future,” he said. “Fossil fuels are indispensable at satisfying our demand.”

Tom Bowles, science advisor to Gov. Bill Richardson, talked about developing smart and green grid technology that could allow for expansion of electric cooperatives and make it easier for homeowners to contribute to the state’s energy needs by harvesting their own solar and wind energy.

“We have the intellectual talent and alignment of policy to do this,” he said. “We’ve been taking advantage of the stimulus funding put out there to jumpstart this initiative. We view the stimulus package as a great opportunity to accelerate and move this initiative forward.”

Teague, a lifelong oilman, said this particular political battle was dear to his heart.

“As I got older and wiser, I realized that no matter how much oil and gas we take out of the ground, it would never be enough,” he said. “I realized if nothing changed to get enough oil and gas for our economy and our military, we would continue to send our money overseas and negotiate for our economic security with leaders of unfriendly nations.”

Teague closed the session by saying something truly unique had occurred within the walls of Corbett Center.

“We have heard from experts in oil and gas, biofuels, nuclear, thermal, solar and wind,” he said. “All parts of the energy conversation have been represented here. Since being sworn in, I have not stopped working to promote all of our energy resources here in the state. What is most important, is that secretary of energy Steven Chu has heard from us. It will be a pretty good deal for New Mexico.”